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The Highland Normal School

DEMOCRACY OF THE MIND

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. NGUYEN-LUU-VIEN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

Following is the text of an interview with Dr. Nguyen-Luu-Vien, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of National Education, as it appeared in "Horizon" (Vol. XIX, No. 9), a magazine published in Manila (Philippines):

"Q. People say Viet-Nam is carrying out major educational reforms. What form are they taking ?

A. To answer that, I must first give you a little background about our educational system, which basically we inherited from the French. It has a built-in problem—too many gaps. Children go to the primary school, and when they complete that there is an exam, a gap. At the end of the 11th year there is what we call the Baccalaureate I exam, another gap. Then the next year, another exam for Baccalaureate II. Without a Bac II, nobody can go to university. Every time there is a gap, we lose too many students. Look here. [Dr. Vien draws a chart on a yellow, lined note pad. He sketches and labels several blocks to represent each segment of the education system.] Here at the beginning, we have 100 students, let us say. At the end of primary school, only 50 remain. Only seven take and pass the Bac II exam at the end of 12 years of schooling. Only three go on to university studies and—of every hundred youngsters — only an average of 1.7 graduates from a university.

Q. I understand that in a recent television appearance you called this whole system 'wasteful'.

A. That's right. Wasteful of talent and abilities. The children who reach Bac I or Bac II level get some knowledge, but no skills. Those 97 per cent who have been leaving school before and after the BAC II to go into life must learn a vocation. Life in this country can be very different



Dr. Nguyen-Luu-Vien.

from what they learn in the classroom. Ability to adapt to real life is what matters. So, for one thing, we are trying to fill all those gaps between the separated segments in the traditional Vietnamese school system. We will have a continuous 12-grade programme. That is what has happened in many of our neighbouring countries—Thailand, the Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia.

Q. A continuous system ? No breaks at all ?

A. Well, there will be the primary school with five grades and the secondary school with seven grades, but with no hard-to-bridge gaps. And, in the primary schools, we have already introduced the 'community school' concept which emphasizes interaction between the community and the student. It is now a nationwide system in our first five grades. The idea is to help the young child understand what happens around him in his environment. What he learns in school must be useful and applied to life in the community where he lives. If he lives in the countryside, for instance, he must know how to produce rice. If he lives near the seashore, he must understand about life in the sea, about fishing. A child in the mountains

must know about the forest and how to manage it. This will be useful when the pupil becomes an adult. Until now, what children learned in their classrooms and read in their textbooks had no relation to life in their environment.

Q. Are the results good ?

A. So far. As community-oriented education takes hold, the people will know better how to improve their way of life, I believe. Until now, our secondary schools have been strong only on academics. A child's diploma has meant knowledge but no skill. Now we are introducing what we call the 'comprehensive' or multipurpose high school that also offers courses in agriculture, home economics, business administration, and industrial arts.

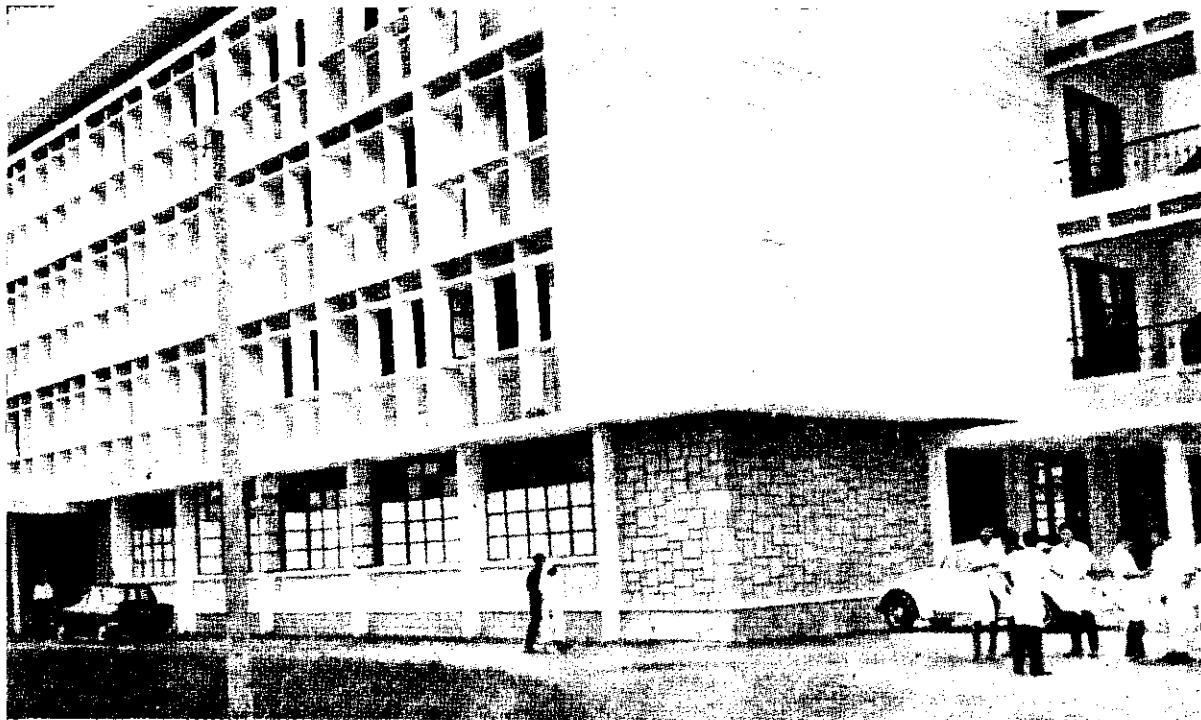
Q. This sounds like a major switchover.

A. It is. However, we have begun to introduce the courses in 11 pilot schools and will extend them to more and more high schools each year.

We have too few shops, laboratories, and other facilities to change over all at once. It is expensive, but we have a worthy purpose—to restructure society to meet post-war requirements for labour.

You see, our society is like a pyramid. At the broadest portion of the base are the masses of farmers and workers with no particular speciality. Then, we have workers with some facility for technical tasks. These are the technicians and supervisors. And finally there are the engineers and other highly-trained individuals from our universities and from universities abroad. But the greatest shortage is in specialized men, workers at the technical level. The pyramid needs reinforcing at that point, and I hope such studies as industrial arts at the secondary-school level will help strengthen our talent pool. After high school, some youth also can go to technical school for a year or two.

Q. Do plans and purposes for reform extend to the university level ?



University of Hue.

A. Yes. Our European heritage in the university system also has led to some wasteful practices. The main waste occurs in the operation of separate faculties. Saigon University, for example, has eight faculties : architecture, dentistry, law, letters, medicine, pedagogy, pharmacy, sciences. If a student enters one faculty and fails after two or three years, he has utterly wasted his time. To get a degree in a different faculty, he must start all over again. There's no possibility for a certificate for his two years' work, and he's little better than a holder of a Bac II, a high school graduate.

Q. You're going to remedy this somehow ?

A. We think there's no reason for every faculty to teach separately basic subjects such as chemistry. You get minimum usage of expensive laboratories, for instance. So we will put students from different faculties together in these basic courses. With interlinking plans of study, a student can switch from one major field to another without losing all of his credits. And the university can

operate more efficiently and cheaply. Its quality of instruction can improve too, because one large laboratory can be better equipped than four or eight smaller ones. In essence, then, we're switching from the European mould to a Vietnamese adaptation of the American mould of university organization. We will have colleges rather than faculties, and we will also build up a two-year certificate system for universities that do not offer four-year curriculums.

Q. How soon will that happen ?

A. We will be taking some steps in the 1970-71 academic year. One Vietnamese university rector and one dean have been studying university organization in the Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and Japan. The ideas they bring back will help us restructure our four-year colleges. Moreover, as I said previously, within a few years we will probably be operating institutes that give two-year vocation-oriented courses -- something like the American junior colleges.



Students in a science laboratory.

Q. Will these changes take place within existing universities or as part of newly created institutions?

A. I don't know yet. The main thing is that the rectors at Saigon and Hue universities, and other educators too, agree that the college system must be established. That is important for Viet-Nam. Our basic system must conform with the one used around South-East Asia. And most of our Asian neighbours already have adopted the college system, as well as a programme of bachelor's and master's degrees that are comparable. With our French-based system, we are out of step. As we approach the 21st century, we do not want to stand alone. So we must adjust our standards to those of our neighbours. Another far-reaching change we are working on is university autonomy. Up to now, according to the French system, the university is ruled by a rector appointed by the Minister of Education. The rector is a servant of the republic. But in a draft law we are presenting to the National Assembly, we will introduce the concept of a board of trustees to govern the university—trustees to be recruited from personalities in industry, banking, labour and other fields.

Q. One governing board for each university?

A. Yes. And, also, each board will have a representative from the Lower House, the Senate, the Educational Council, the Economic and Social Council, and the City Council. We want a very broad base. There also will be a national co-ordinating council, but only to assure comparability of degrees between institutions and curricula. But the power will be held by the governing board of each university.

Q. Do you propose to name student members to the governing board?

A. Not yet. However, it will be up to the National Assembly to decide about that.

Q. Dr. Vien, we've talked about reforms and how they affect institutions and the pupils directly. May we touch a bit more on changes that affect parents and the community as a whole?

A. Certainly. There's the financing of secondary schools. Under the French system, there were no fees or tuition except, of course, in private schools. This limits our expansion of secondary schools, because the war taxes our economy very strongly and education receives only 4.4 per cent of the national budget. Therefore, the Senate has recommended that the executive initiate tuition charges in high schools. If we developed a national plan and sought to impose tuition from above with payment to the education ministry, it wouldn't work. I have developed a plan for local autonomy on this matter. A directorate composed of local authorities, leaders of the parents' association, the principal, and teachers would be formed at each high school. This committee would set the tuition, collect it, and decide how to use the money.

Q. What reception do you get to this plan?

A. The Student-Parent Associations around the country favour the idea. Especially in the provinces. They know how terribly long it takes to get a little money to repair a school roof, or something like that. Sometimes a request may take weeks, and then the reply often is, 'Sorry, but the ministry has no money'. Vietnamese families, especially those in the rural areas, are ready to sacrifice for the education of their children. They know it will take good schools and good teachers. For that reason, I think the average farm family would be happy to give perhaps 10 *gia* [about 200 kilos] of paddy rice as tuition to make a better high school for their child's education.

Q. Talking about parents' contributions, I've heard that the Ministry of Education has made an urgent request for classroom furnishings for the 1970-71 school year.

A. The ministry explained to parents that it had no more money for that programme. The Student-Parent Associations have taken up the challenge and are helping furnish new classrooms to increase enrolments, especially at the sixth-grade level. Next year we will have 400 new classrooms for the sixth-year group in the provinces and nearly 100 in Saigon. This will permit us to enrol from 46 to 50 per cent of the children

who should continue from the fifth grade to the sixth grade in 1970-71. We were able to take only 32 or 33 per cent of that group in 1969-70.

Q. Taking a look at all the changes occurring in Vietnamese education, which do you feel is the most far-reaching?

A. A continuous 12-year school cycle, which President Thieu put into effect by decree several months ago. With that, it is not possible to turn back. Also there is something else we are working toward that is very important—I call it the regionalization of our education.

Q. Which is?

A. Decentralization. I've told you about our plan to form directorates of community and school leaders to oversee local financing of high schools. Equally as important, we would like to encourage regional initiative in education policy-making. Representatives of each school's directorate could meet at a co-ordinating council on a province level, for instance. Such a province council could be authorized to decide a variety of matters, including limited curriculum policies.

Q. On the subject of regionalization, I understand that Viet-Nam now has teachers' colleges in all the geographic areas of the country.

A. Yes, but preparation of teachers is still a key problem. Nothing can be accomplished without good teachers and enough of them. That's why our slogan these days is 'All for Teacher Training'. Thus we emphasize our new normal schools and a strong effort toward inservice training for teachers during the summer vacation period. Teachers get special courses on the new mathematics, the new chemistry, new science advances, and so on.

Q. If you continue to graduate new teachers and to implement reforms, what will be some of the direct results in the coming years?

A. We should be able to enrol all children in the primary schools, the first five grades, by 1975. That's our goal. I wish we could do the same for secondary schools by then, but it would take more

new teachers and school-buildings than we can possibly create in that period. In a few more years perhaps. . . .

Q. Let's take a broader look. Say, to the 21st century. What should education in Viet-Nam contribute?

A. There are two key areas that demand the attention of us Vietnamese educators. First, it becomes more clear all the time that at this point in history no one country can live alone; so we must introduce, even to the young children, the idea of international co-operation and interdependence. I have told my teachers that we must tell youngsters about how South-East Asians must accept to live with their neighbours—that is, Vietnamese with Cambodians, Cambodians with Thais, and so on. Second, perhaps the fate of humanity will be decided in the Pacific area. So we must change to have our eyes more and more turned to the Pacific. This is quite different from my generation, whose eyes were fixed on Europe.

Q. And that is why you are turning away from the less-relevant forms of European education?

A. That is part of it. Until now, our students have gone to school to hear what the teacher says and to accept that as truth, without question. This is due to the Confucian system we inherited, as well as to European traditions. In today's world, though, we need discussion—especially at the university level—between professor and student. That is the first step to a real democracy, a democracy of the mind. The professor should say to the student, 'We have come here—you and I together—and together we will find the truth. We will find it in many books, and by experience, and by our devotion to study. We will have lectures and seminars and, above all, we will discuss.' Perhaps adoption of this approach to education, even in the lower levels, will be the most important thing education can do for furthering the practice of democracy in our Vietnamese society. Students don't learn how to think by repeating facts they have memorized. They must learn to question as well as to accept. They will be better citizens for it."

Vietnamese Legend

THE JAR OF GOLD

Adapted by George F. Schultz

There was once a very poor farmer and his wife who lived very quietly in the Vietnamese countryside. Every morning, at sunup, the farmer would go to his field where he would labor until sundown.

The farmer's father before him had labored in much the same way, and there would be little or no change in the life of his sons. He thought neither of the past nor of the future. For him, the important thing was simply the completion of each day's task within the allotted time. He lived from day to day, unconcerned with the ambitions of other men.

One morning, as the farmer worked the soil, his foot struck a hard, unyielding object. He scraped the dirt away and found an earthen jar (chum). It was so heavy that he had difficulty in lifting it. He pried off the lid and found that the jar was filled with gold. After looking at his find for a few minutes, the farmer replaced the lid and put the jar back in the ground at the place where he had discovered it.

On returning home that evening, the farmer told his wife about the jar. At first she was very pleased; but when he told her that he had reburied the gold, she became very angry.

"Why didn't you bring it home with you?" she asked excitedly. "It was a gift from Heaven. Someone else is sure to find it and then you will have lost it forever."

The farmer seemed unconcerned.

"If it is really Heaven's gift," he replied, "no one else will take it. If it is not Heaven's gift, I don't want it".

While the farmer and his wife were engaged in this argument, two thieves were lurking outside their cottage, listening to their conversation. When the thieves learned about the jar of gold, they hurried away to the farmer's field with the intention of stealing it. They dug away the soil and found the jar to their den, eager to divide the gold.

But when the two thieves opened the jar, they found that it contained a nest of snakes; not a bit of gold was to be seen. Then they became very angry. They replaced the lid and threw the jar away.

The following morning, the farmer went to his field at the usual hour and immediately discovered the open hole from which the jar had been removed. The loss of the jar did not seem to bother the farmer, however, and he continued to till the soil until sundown. On returning home, he told his wife that the jar had disappeared.

"Of course", she replied sarcastically. "Who other than you would have left a jar of gold in an open field?"

Now, it happened that the two thieves were again eavesdropping outside the farmer's cottage. When the latter mentioned the jar of gold, the evil in them was aroused and they then thought of having their revenge on the poor man. They located the jar, took it back to the field, and buried it again, hoping that the poisonous snakes would bite the farmer when he opened it.

On the third day, when the farmer went to his field, he was surprised to see that the jar was again in place; however, he did not touch it. That evening he told his wife of the strange happening.

"One day," she said angrily, "you find a jar of gold; the following day you lose it; and now you tell me that you have found it again. What am I to believe?"

The farmer assured his wife that he was speaking the truth.

"Then go back to the field," she said, "and bring home the jar. It must be a gift from Heaven if it has been returned to its place."

"No," replied the farmer stubbornly. "If the jar of gold is a gift of Heaven, it will be sent here without our help."

The two thieves had again stationed themselves outside the cottage, and their desire for revenge was terrible to behold. They were certain that the farmer and his wife had made fools of them; therefore, they decided to teach them a lesson.

The evil men went to the farmer's field and dug up the jar, which they took to his home and placed on his doorstep. Then they hid behind a clump of bamboo in order to see what would happen.

Early next morning, the farmer made his customary preparations to go to his field. When he opened the door, he saw the jar on his doorstep. He shouted for his wife to come to the door. When she picked up the jar and turned it over, gold coins fell from it in torrents.

The two thieves then realized that their plans had been thwarted by a higher power. They stole away without being seen.

The farmer and his wife were then quite wealthy. The latter dressed herself in fine clothes and took on a superior air. But the acquisition of great wealth failed to change the farmer in any way. He continued to work at the tasks assigned to him by the hand of fate and did so until the day of his death.

From this story the Vietnamese have derived the following proverb:

"Whoever is predestined to become rich will become rich without difficulty; that is why it is unnecessary to have any special eyes in order to become rich."

NEWS IN BRIEF

COMMUNIQUE

Following is the text of the communique issued by the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 8, 1971, on U.S. troops reduction to be implemented as of May 1, 1971:

After consultation with the Government of the United States, the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam has agreed on a further reduction of the U.S. forces in Viet-Nam by 100,000. These will be gradually replaced by Vietnamese troops.

This decision, based on the continued strengthening of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Viet-Nam, will come into effect on May 1st and will have been implemented by December 1, 1971.

On this occasion, the Government and People of the Republic of Viet-Nam wish once again to acknowledge their indebtedness to the Government and People of the United States for their generous cooperation and assistance in the fight against the common enemy.

RVN GENERALLY SECURE

April 8, 1971. - French nationals living in South Vietnam now find the country generally secure, according to French Senator Andre Armengaud who recently made a visit to Saigon. Armengaud, on this occasion, also contrasted his feeling with his last visit to Saigon some three years ago. Then, he said, Frenchmen in Cambodia and South Vietnam were uneasy and many asked about repatriation to France in the face of the "omnipresent" Viet Cong pressure.

On the current visit, he said, Frenchmen "rejoiced in the refound freedom of movement throughout South Vietnam to the point where they can travel by car without danger from the cities to their plantations." At another point, he also said, "nobody talks about going back to France any more." The same thing could be said of French residents in Cambodia.

NORWEGIAN MOVE DEPLORED

April 8, 1971 - The South Vietnamese Foreign Ministry said last week it is regrettable that the new Norwegian government is making preparations for a possible recognition of North Vietnam "since such a move can in no way contribute to peace in Indochina."

"While the Communist North Vietnamese are pursuing their policy of aggression against the Republic of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, the recognition of North Vietnam by the Norwegian government has no other effect than to encourage the Communists to continue their war of aggression and hinder the Paris peace talks."

VIKYNO PLANT INAUGURATED

April 8, 1971. - The Vietnam Ky Nghe Nong Co (VIKYNO) Plant was inaugurated by President Nguyen Van Thieu on Wednesday March 24, 1971. At the ribbon cutting ceremony, President Thieu called on Vietnamese businessman to follow VIKYNO's example by investing in the production of agricultural and fishing machinery and equipment. He said "the peace that all of us have been longing for is now nearer than ever before and to maintain and strengthen that peace every effort must be focussed on building a strong economy oriented toward self-support and self-strengthening."

VIKYNO Company was established in 1967 with an equity of VN \$ 200 million (about US \$ 750,000) owned by the Vietnam Commercial Credit Bank (75%) and the SOFIDIV (25%). SOFIDIV is an investment company controlled by the Vietnam Commercial Credit Bank. Total investment in the VIKYNO enterprise is valued at VN \$ 600 million (about US \$ 2.5 million) of which about VN \$ 400 million (about US \$ 1.2 million) is for machinery and equipment. Technical assistance is provided by KUBOTA of Japan.

The plant is located on a 10-acre site in the Bien Hoa Industrial Park. It is projected to assemble the following items during this first operational year:

- 1,500 hand-power tillers (Capacity: 700 square meters per hour per tiller)
- 3,000 diesel engines (5 and 7 HP)
- 1,200 water pumps (Capacity 1 cubic meter of water per minute per pump)
- 600 marine diesel engines (from 10 to 30 HP).

As much as 40% of the components is reportedly manufactured locally and the remainder is imported from Japan. It is estimated that the VIKYNO assembling plant helps save US \$ 600,000 in government-owned foreign exchange per year. The plant employs 200 workers.

The first power tiller to come out of the assembly line was given to President Thieu as a gift from the VIKYNO Company.

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